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A Rhyme of Nantucket

JULY, 1895

Wm. D. Woodward

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CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

NANTUCKET, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY,

JULY 9, 10, 11, 1895.

A RHYME OF NANTUCKET

BY A NATIVE.



PROVIDENCE :
SNOW & FARNHAM, PRINTERS.
1895.

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A RHYME OF NANTUCKET.

I have taken a fancy as I take up my style,
To rhyme an account of my own native isle,—
A few little stories concerning its find,
And other such things as occur to my mind,—
Of its rise and its progress from village to town,
Till it grew to a place of no mean renown,
Till it came within one [thousand inhabitants] of
being a city
With mayor and aldermen, council, committee,
And other like animals cities don't need
Upon the public treasury to feed.
But most of all I wish to relate
How it's becoming at present of all in the State,
Yea, the *famousest* place in all creation
In which to pass your summer vacation.
Some stories are legends while others are facts,
To tell which is which, you may judge by the acts.
Of how 'twas discovered I need only say
That an Indian babe was beheld one day

By its anxious mamma to be flying away
In the claws of a U. S. eagle gray.
It was followed afar in birchen canoe
Till land was descried ne'er thought to be true.
The Indians landed and found their papoose
Stowed snugly away in the eagle's caboose ;
And then they thought it sufficient excuse,
Having come thus far, to slip off the noose
That bound them to friends on the far distant main,
And tie up anew love's thus severed chain.
Now others soon coming, they made up a race
Which`scattered like sheep all over the place,
And when found by the Whites were divided in three
Chief tribes with their Sachems to oversee.

Another old legend concerning its name
Relates that once in the world was a dame
Who had three blooming daughters so fresh and so
fair

That scarce could their equals be found anywhere.
One was Elizabeth so tall and so prim,
So lean and so lank, so slender, so slim.
The second was Martha with rosy cheeks,
A bluish gray eye and nose of the Greeks.

Her pleasant fair face was round as the sun,
And she weighed, for a guess, an eighth of a ton.
The youngest was Nancy, bright, happy and gay,
As lithe as a squirrel, as laughing as May.
In the course of events it next came to pass
That the islands southeast of the good State of Mass.
Came into possession of *pater familias*,
A charming old man, neither crabbed nor bilious.
Being a prudent father, he next wished to give
To each of his daughters a place where to live.
But now came a puzzle, as you all plainly see,
For here were ten islands to share among three.
Now two were quite large, and the others were small
And strung off in a line exceedingly tall
And slim as a school boy dunce's cap,
As you'll see by glancing upon the map.
A thought struck the father as he pondered it o'er
Which appeared to impress him more and more.
"I have it," he cried, "I'll do it so,"
And he called up his daughters all in a row.
To Elizabeth tall he gave the long group
And asked her to name them. She said with a stoop,
And a face wreathed about with pleasantest smiles,
"Father, I'll call them the *Elizabeth Isles*."

To round-favored Martha he gave with a smile
The largest of all, a most beautiful isle.
The reason for this you at once may surmise,
The island and maid corresponded in size !
Said *pater*, " Now what will you call it, my girl ? "
"*Martha's Vineyard*," said she, with a toss of her curl.
There was now but one left,—why need I grow hoarse ?
And that one, you see, why—*Nan-tuck-et*, of course.

Thus run the legends, but history says
Bartholomew Gosnold discovered the place,
As he sailed long ago by the bleak, barren shore
Which he named New England in memory of yore.
Be that as it may, suffice it to say,
The Whites one day came over the bay
And bought the isle, and what did they pay ?
It wasn't in clam shells, nor 'twasn't in cats,
'Twas thirty pounds sterling and two beaver hats.
Soon houses increased and men came to learn
That a new little town by the name of Sherburne
Was anchored some thirty miles out at sea,
As pleasant a spot as ever could be.
So the place grew ; generations were born,
And succeeded by others, each in its turn.

The white men increased, the red men grew small,
Till at last hardly one was left of them all,
For when White man appears, Injun goes to the wall.
In process of time the town grew so large in
Size that its centre grew out of its margin.
So all that was done in so easy a plight
Was to take off its *specks* and change its *site*.
From a vale in the west it moved toward the east
Where the broad, land-locked harbor was by no
means the least
Inducement to change its former condition
For a more favorable one in its present position.
And, for the reason one buys a brand-new water-
bucket,
She changed her name, too, from Sherburne to
Nantucket.

A century has passed since the old name wore out,
It is time that we welcomed the new with a shout !
The new one has now achieved veneration
Enough to invite the present generation,
Yea, the past, and *pre-past*, to come one and come all
From o'er the wide earth at Nantucket's call.
Come, Nantucket's sons, and Nantucket's daughters,

From east and from west, yea, come from all quarters,
Stand up and be counted, both thee and thine
Somewhat in alphabetical line,—

The Allens, the Austins, and all the good Quakers,
The Barnards and Barneys, the Bunkers, the Bakers,
The Coffins and Colemans, the Cartwrights and
Chases,

The Carys and Crosbys, the Mitchells, the Macys,
The Dunhams, the Eastons, the Folgers, the Fishers,
The Gardners, the Geraldts, and a host of well-wishers,
The Handys and Husseys, the Jones and the Joys,
Mooers, Murpheys and Myricks, all good girls and
boys,

The Paddacks and Pinkhams, the Rays and the
Russells,—

With leviathan of old they've had many tussles,—
And Starbuck and Swain, and Whippey, and —
W(h)y(!)-er

To attempt all to name it is vain to aspire.
Assemble just now on the bright sea-girt isle
To greet one another with handshake and smile,
While three summer days — would they were
triennial! —

We remain to observe Nantucket's centennial!

All praise to our Father whose kind loving hand
Has brought us once more to our own native land.
We welcome each other, we welcome the stranger,
And thankful we are that free from all danger
We come from our various life occupations
To extend to each other warm congratulations.

But back to my story ; I now must proclaim
How the town has succeeded since changing its name.
One time a smart man, looking out for a sail
With one of his eyes discovered a whale.
The other eye saw, at a moment's swift glance,
A purse of gold dollars pocketed by his pants.
For in those days whale oil was not at a rate
Compared with what it has been of late.
With the help of a neighbor he launched out his boat
And harpooned the monster behind his black throat.
The business thus started in such a small way
Became to the island a source of great pay,
And from catching by boats sent off from the shore
They fitted out ships to bring them the more.
Way out on broad ocean's rough billows were sent
Nantucket's brave sons, and oft they have spent
Even three or four years on the deep, briny sea,

Ere homeward to loved ones the swift ships did flee.
How happy the day when with full laden ship,
With joy in each heart, and a smile on each lip,
The prow is turned homeward ! what visions arise
Of Nantucket's shores, and her daughters' bright
eyes !

The good ship speeds on, ploughing through the white
foam,

Just as if she also felt glad to go home.

"Land ahead !" "Where away ?" "Two points
off the lee !"

And there in the distance the island they see.

Many hearts render thanks as they sail into port,
That through all the long voyage they were guided
unhurt,

And at night round the fireside thrilling stories are
told

Of hairbreadth escapes by the mariners bold.

How in tempests and storms they weathered the gale ;
Or rejoiced many times when a homeward-bound sail
Crossed over their path, or one starting later
Brought a packet of letters from sweetheart and *mater*.
How sometimes great leviathan, enraged at the blow,
Lashing high the blue sea, darting swift to and fro,

Would mayhap stave the boat, and far from the ship .
Would leave the men swimming with pale face and lip,
Until in good fortune their comrades come near
In the ship's second boat and save them from fear.

Nine thousand inhabitants soon filled the town
Owning ninety swift ships,—a place of renown.
Now, as is often the case when going so far
Through a field you are brought to a stand by a bar,
So the whaling port, greatest in all the land,
Was partly thus checked by a bar made of sand,
Which stretched clear across the head of the bay,
And in going or coming was right in the way.
The great ships when empty, at the height of the tide,
Could cross through the channel to the opposite side.
But when the tide ebbed, or the ships were all full,
A *camel* was needed o'er the bar them to pull.
These *camels* were creatures of “the mother of
invention,”

And were based on the rule that the natural intention
Of air is to buoy what is placed in suspension.
A huge double box was sunk 'neath the ship,
Fitting snugly each side to the great vessel's hip,
And, the water removed by means of a pump,

The *camel* arose with the ship on its hump,
And safely bore cargo and crew in a lump.
Another check, too, was the decline of the whale,
And petroleum's discovery in William Penn's vale.
Business went down, young men went away,
And left the old place with its sea-captains gray
To live in retirement and life-long ease
On their fortunes hard-earned on the far distant seas,
Till at present instead of nine thousand we find
About thirty-two hundred, hospitable and kind.

But now, since the day the fashion arose
In the Summer to seek a few weeks of repose
From the labor at school and the toil at the store,
As a summer resort it has grown more and more
To be held by strangers in highest esteem
For its cool ocean breeze and its sky so serene,
Its quaint quiet ways, its temperature mild,
Its pure healthful air for man, woman and child.
Its large and fine harbor for sailing and fishing
Is, doubtless, the thing for which many are wishing
As they go from hot cities and towns on the main
With a song on their lips, and this the refrain : —
“ Hurrah for Nantucket ! hurrah for the shore

Where bluefish and scups we'll catch evermore,
And then to a cove we our booty will take,
And end the good time with a squantum clambake."

In the sparkling blue waves is the place for a bath,
There is no better place than Nantucket hath
In her snug quiet harbor, or off from the cliff
Where the pipe of old Neptune blows forth a strong
whiff.

If the waves of the bay are not exciting enough,
Walk across to the ocean and bathe in the surf.
From the banks of old 'Sconset is heard 'long the shore
The grand mighty song of the surf's heavy roar.
In storms when the wind nigh a hurricane blows,
High up on the bank the angry sea throws
Its surges of foam, while off on the reef
A vessel is struggling in need of relief.
Many times in the history of Nantucket's sons
Have they rescued and sheltered the shipwrecked
ones.

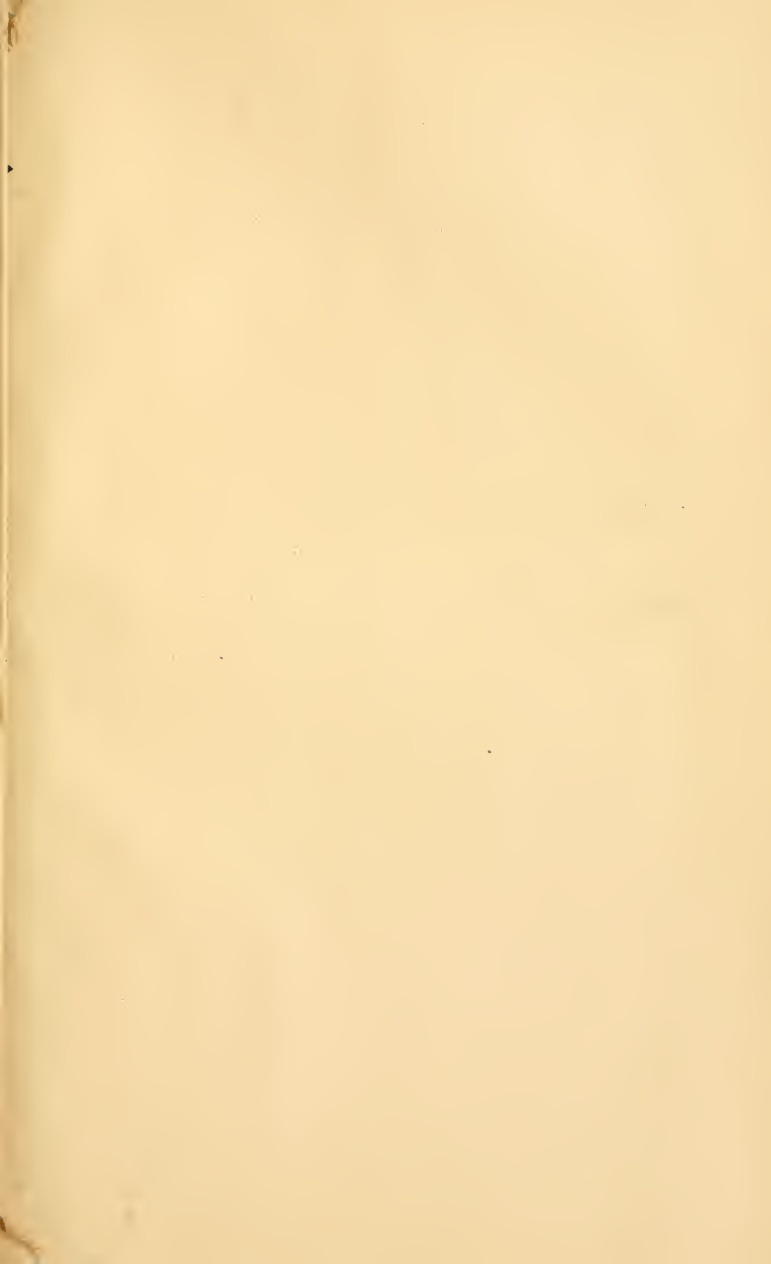
Just a mile to the north is Sankoty light,
Whose lantern revolves — a wonderful sight,—
Whose cut-glass prisms are tinted with hues
Which the sun-lighted raindrops always diffuse ;

Whose flash every minute through a powerful lens
Throws upward the light till its angle subtends
One-eighth of a circle, which every one sees
Is just one-half of ninety degrees.

And sailors on shipboard, they commonly say,
Have seen its bright gleam forty miles away.
What a tonic there is in the bracing sea breeze!
How glorious to gaze on the unbounded seas
Stretching over to Europe in unbroken sweep,—
The heart grows sublime to gaze on the deep.

But to know of Nantucket one-half of its charm
Requires something more than a poet's weary arm
To describe ; for yourself to the isle you must sail
And see how much in description I fail.





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